



Strengthening Disability Inclusion in Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) – The Case of Cameroon

Acronyms

CUAPWD	Coordinating Unit of Associations of Persons with Disabilities
DID Officer	Disability Inclusion Development Officer
DWG	Disability Working Group
GFFO	German Federal Foreign Office
HI	Humanity & Inclusion
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
HPC	Humanitarian Program Cycle
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
(I)NGOs	(International) Non-Governmental Organisations
LNOB3	Leave No One Behind Phase 3
OPDs	Organizations of Persons with Disabilities
UN CRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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Published by Christoffel-Blindenmission – Christian Blind Mission e.V. (CBM).

The publication is an outcome of the ‘Leave No One Behind’ Phase 3 project. This project, financed by the German Federal Foreign Office, is implemented by CBM in consortium with Handicap International e.V., and the Ruhr University Bochum's Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict. It has the overarching goal of Mainstreaming Disability in Global and Local Humanitarian Action in Line with the IASC Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. Besides global activities, CBM is the implementation lead for three pilot countries in West and Central Africa: Nigeria, Cameroon and Niger.

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The report is financed with support from the German Federal Foreign Office.

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Cover photo credits: Participants of high-level training for various humanitarian actors in Cameroon during a training exercise. © CBM

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Executive Summary

This case study presents the efforts made in Cameroon to mainstream disability inclusion within humanitarian responses under the 'Leave No One Behind!' Phase 3 project, funded by the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO). Cameroon has made notable progress in aligning with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, focusing on the systematic integration of disability considerations across sectors.

The integration of disability inclusion into the Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) for 2023 and 2024 represents a notable achievement. Building on the foundations of a previous GFFO-funded project (2020–2022), the Leave No One Behind! Phase 3 project has advanced disability inclusion through initiatives such as disability audits and capacity building for organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs). A key driver of progress has been the collaboration between CBM and the 'Pool of Experts,' a group of OPD leaders from various regions trained to provide technical support on disability inclusion in the humanitarian response. This collaboration resulted in embedding disability inclusion into the HRPs, with specific targets and accountability measures through disability-sensitive indicators. Priorities moving forward include enhancing OPDs' technical capacities and securing sustainable funding for disability-inclusive efforts.

The case of Cameroon reflects how effective collaboration between OPDs, UN agencies, and humanitarian organizations can drive systemic changes for disability inclusion. It emphasizes the importance of inclusive planning, tailored sectoral interventions, and continuous capacity-building for OPDs to enhance their impact. Despite challenges, such as funding gaps and inconsistent data collection, the evidence shows the potential for meaningful change when disability inclusion is prioritized within humanitarian action. Moving forward, sustained commitment, targeted advocacy for adequate funding and programming, and the expansion of technical capacities are crucial to ensuring that the rights and specific requirements of persons with disabilities are met in humanitarian responses.

Key Facts	
Geographical Focus	different regions of Cameroon impacted by three complex humanitarian crises.
Primary Aim	Strengthen disability inclusion in Cameroon's humanitarian response, ensuring that the specific requirements of persons with disabilities are integrated into HRPs
Initial Situations	Progress in integrating disability data and strategies in the Cameroon HRP was limited due to a lack of baseline information and inconsistent inclusion practices.
Strategic Achievements	The 2023 and 2024 Cameroon HRPs represent significant progress in disability inclusion within humanitarian planning. Key achievements include the establishment of disability-specific targets and measurable indicators, ensuring accountability, and systematic integration of disability considerations across sectors.
Key Enablers	The collaboration with CBM and the Pool of Experts, consisting of OPD leaders from different regions in Cameroon, has been essential in promoting the inclusion of OPDs in both technical and advocacy roles, enhancing the effectiveness of humanitarian responses.
Future Needs	To advance disability inclusion in Cameroon's humanitarian response, key priorities include ensuring active participation of trained OPDs and CBM in sectoral meetings, expanding the Pool of Experts' visibility, and providing technical support through a dedicated toolkit.

Introduction

In humanitarian crises, persons with disabilities are often among those most in need of assistance as they are at heightened risk of violence, exploitation, or abuse. Persons with disabilities also face discrimination due to significant barriers to accessing needed humanitarian assistance. Increased vulnerability of persons with disabilities is created by a range of factors, including environmental barriers, stigma, and discrimination, as well as the design and delivery of the humanitarian response itself. If persons with disabilities are not adequately considered at all phases of the Humanitarian Program Cycle (HPC) and in humanitarian coordination, there is a risk that humanitarian action may fail to address the specific factors that place them at risk, including barriers to equitable access to protection and assistance.

Due to a strong push from different entities, the shift toward a rights-based approach to addressing disability-specific discrimination and rights violations has only recently emerged in the humanitarian field, gaining momentum in 2016 during the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul. In the subsequent years, more evidence highlighted the gaps experienced by persons with disabilities during humanitarian crises, culminating in the endorsement of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in 2019¹.

Despite the progress that has been achieved with the endorsement of the IASC guidelines, disability inclusion is still not systematically anchored in Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNOs) or Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs). The following case study aims to illustrate the practical integration of disability inclusion into the HRPs in Cameroon for 2023 and 2024. By showcasing the successes and challenges encountered during this process, this case study aims to provide practical insights and lessons learned that can be applied to enhance disability inclusion in humanitarian responses globally. We hope that this example will inspire other humanitarian actors to adopt similar approaches in other contexts.



Participants during a regional workshop on disability inclusive humanitarian action, held in Yaoundé in 2023. © CBM

¹ Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. (2019). Available at: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-guidelines-on-inclusion-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-humanitarian-action-2019>

Background and Context

Cameroon has been grappling with multiple humanitarian crises, particularly in the Northwest, Southwest, and Far North regions, where ongoing conflict and violence have left many displaced and exposed already vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities, to additional risks. According to the HRP 2024, 3.4 million people in Cameroon needed lifesaving assistance and protection. Non-state armed groups continue to deliberately target educational facilities, staff and school children, frequently interrupting access to education for children. Climate shocks and health epidemics in the regions worsen the situation. This volatile situation leads to overburdened host communities as well as reduced and overstretched disability inclusive basic service systems in all sectors. Specific needs of persons with disabilities are considered only in a limited number of ongoing humanitarian interventions.

In 2023, the HRP highlighted for the first time CBM's role in supporting the humanitarian community to mainstream disability inclusion, specifically stating, 'In 2023, Christian Blind Mission (CBM) will support the humanitarian community in mainstreaming disability inclusion in humanitarian action'. The continuity of CBM's support was reaffirmed in the 2024 HRP.

The groundwork for disability inclusion in humanitarian action in Cameroon was laid through a project, which was also funded by the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO) and ran from 2020 to 2022 in the Northwest and Southwest regions. The project conducted disability audits that identified barriers to inclusion for persons with disabilities, helping to shape the region's approach to disability-inclusive humanitarian work.

The results of these audits were instrumental in improving the response to the specific needs of persons with disabilities and began to foster more engagement with organizations such as the umbrella OPD Coordinating Unit of Associations of Persons with Disabilities (CUAPWD).

These early efforts served as a starting point for broader disability inclusion in the humanitarian response. The launch of the LNOB3 project further extended the work initiated by the GFFO project in the Northwest and Southwest regions. The 2023 HRP already reflected these advancements and the 2024 HRP is an outstanding example of disability-inclusiveness. It marks an important step forward in systematically integrating disability inclusion into humanitarian response planning across Cameroon, ensuring a more inclusive and accountable approach to addressing the requirements of persons with disabilities. The positive momentum from these initiatives highlights the growing recognition of the critical need for disability inclusion in humanitarian programming².

² For more detailed insights, refer to the Disability Inclusion Humanitarian Audit report: Disability Inclusion Humanitarian Audit Reveals Barriers to Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, CBC Health Services, available at: <https://cbchealthservices.org/disability-inclusion-humanitarian-audit-reveals-barriers-to-inclusion-of-persons-with-disabilities/>

Key Steps and Milestones Leading to a Disability-Inclusive Humanitarian Response Plan

Baseline Study and Mapping of OPDs – Late 2022

The initial efforts leading to developing a disability-inclusive HRP in Cameroon began with a comprehensive baseline study in October 2022. It was the first activity of the LNOB3 project in the country. Prior a dedicated position of a Disability Inclusion Development (DID) Officer was created within the CBM Cameroon country office to support humanitarian project implementation. It was filled by the LNOB3 DID officer, to support capacity development measures for OPDs and humanitarian actors and advance disability inclusion within Cameroon's humanitarian system.

Conducted between October and November 2022, this study focused on mapping the capacities of OPDs and disability-focused NGOs across Cameroon and analysed the extent of their involvement in humanitarian action. Findings indicated that, although 33% of OPDs had a basic understanding of humanitarian action, only a minority grasped broader humanitarian systems or coordination roles. Regional disparities were also evident, with OPDs in the Northwest and Southwest regions demonstrating a stronger knowledge of humanitarian coordination than those in other areas. To a certain extent, the CBM team linked these differences in understanding of the humanitarian system among OPDs to the fact, that several OPDs had benefited from training on humanitarian topics under a GFFO-financed regional project that had started earlier.³ The study uncovered significant barriers to OPD engagement, including limited access to critical information, funding shortages, and unfamiliarity with technical humanitarian terminology.

These limitations in resources and knowledge restricted OPDs' meaningful engagement in humanitarian activities. Although 59% of OPDs had engaged in some humanitarian response, only a small fraction was involved in essential areas such as needs assessment (31%) or project implementation (21%). Less than 2% of OPDs had formal partnerships with humanitarian actors, underlining the fragmented and limited nature of their involvement.

The CBM DID Officer in Cameroon, emphasized that this mapping was a critical first step in identifying strengths and gaps among OPDs, which enabled the project team to design targeted capacity-building activities to bridge these. The results of the mapping laid a 'real directive' for project implementation, shaping subsequent actions and ensuring relevance and responsiveness.

Early Capacity Building and Formation of the Pool of Experts

In response to these findings, a series of capacity-building activities for OPDs were carried out. Starting in late November 2022, the first training on the humanitarian system for OPDs from all regions of Cameroon was conducted alongside the validation of the mapping report. Subsequently, CBM through the LNOB3 project facilitated national and regional training sessions for OPDs, conducted across multiple regions. These sessions were designed not only to improve OPDs' advocacy, humanitarian system education, and coordination skills but also to give OPDs a direct voice in humanitarian planning. They enabled OPDs to meaningfully engage in discussions on their roles in the HRP, promoting alignment with national humanitarian priorities.

Additionally, these capacity-building sessions resulted in preparing a selected group of OPD representatives from different regions as a 'Pool of Experts', e.g. a more formalized group to provide technical support to humanitarian organizations all over Cameroon. This Pool of Experts was

³ The 'Disability-Inclusive Humanitarian Action (DIHA) in West and Central Africa' project, implemented in Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon and DRC and equally funded by the German Federal Foreign Office and a previous pilot project that was only implemented in Cameroon

equipped to review tools, facilitate training, and provide technical support to humanitarian organizations, becoming instrumental in consultations for the HRP. Notably, the period of the capacity building series also marked the first in-person participation of OPDs in the HNO and HRP development workshops in October 2023⁴, allowing them to contribute actively to disability-related assessments and bring their perspectives to national humanitarian priorities.

These initial steps—mapping OPD capacities and conducting focused capacity-building activities—established a solid foundation for forming a coordinated and well-informed ‘Pool of Experts’ for Disability Inclusion in the Humanitarian System. According to the CBM LNOB3 officer, this approach was instrumental in ensuring that OPDs were prepared to engage meaningfully and effectively within the humanitarian framework, ultimately setting the foundation for a more inclusive HRP. In March 2024, after many months of training and preparing, the Pool of Experts was finally formally structured and established, further solidifying OPDs' capacity to provide technical support, lead consultations, and advance disability-inclusive practices across Cameroon’s humanitarian system.

High-Level Trainings for Humanitarian Actors on Disability Inclusion

In parallel with efforts to equip OPDs with the necessary skills to engage meaningfully in the humanitarian system, CBM targeted humanitarian mainstream actors. From May 29 to 31, 2023, CBM conducted a high-level training session aimed at strengthening disability inclusion within humanitarian action in Cameroon as part of the LNOB3 project. Held in Yaoundé and organized in collaboration with UNICEF, CHINGO (Coordination of Humanitarian International NGOs), and UN-OCHA, this training aimed to enhance the capacity of senior humanitarian leaders, including country directors and program managers, to integrate disability considerations into their programs.

The collaboration with OCHA stemmed from CBM’s active participation in monthly humanitarian coordination meetings since April 2022, where CBM consistently advocated for disability inclusion in humanitarian response. This advocacy drew the attention of OCHA officials, who subsequently ensured CBM's prominent role in humanitarian coordination in Cameroon.

Following one such meeting, CBM shared plans for the high-level training, sparking interest from UNICEF, which spontaneously offered to collaboratively organize the activity, further strengthening the partnership.

The training took place in May 2023 and was attended by 32 participants from 21 organizations, representing a mix of UN agencies, INGOs, local NGOs, OPDs, and government ministries. UN-OCHA and CHINGO, Cameroon’s Humanitarian INGOs Platform, played a key role by sharing information with humanitarian actors, inviting organizations to participate, and distributing registration links across their networks.

The training was co-facilitated by Chick Fru Sama, General Coordinator of CUAPWD, an influential OPD leader based in Bamenda in the Northwest region, who had already been involved in several CBM project activities and training. It focused on operationalizing the IASC Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. Topics included the UN CRPD and its Article 11 ‘Situations of Risk and Humanitarian Emergencies’, the situation of persons with disabilities in crisis contexts, and practical applications of the Four Must-Do Actions from the IASC Guidelines, emphasizing barrier removal, meaningful participation, empowerment, and data

⁴ CBM Supports the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Humanitarian Needs Overview and Humanitarian Response Plan in Cameroon. HI Deutschland. 2023. Available at: <https://www.hi-deutschland-projekte.de/lno/cbm-supports-the-inclusion-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-the-humanitarian-needs-overview-and-humanitarian-response-plan-in-cameroon/>

collection. The senior-level focus highlighted the role of high-ranking decision-makers in driving inclusive practices and integrating disability considerations into program design.

Building on the capacity-building initiatives and partnerships established in 2022, CBM and UNICEF continued their collaborative effort to strengthen disability inclusion by expanding trainings, including a dedicated tool development training held in Buea in June 2024, but generally integrating OPDs into more formal roles within workshops, consultations, and sector meetings throughout 2023 and 2024. This included inputs for the Health, Food Security and Protection sector.

The three-day-long training in Buea, again co-facilitated by CUAPWD, targeted program managers and Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning officers from humanitarian organizations, focusing on developing and adapting tools to become disability-inclusive. Attended by 26 participants from 19 organizations, the training aimed at transferring practical approaches to incorporating the requirements and perspectives of persons with disabilities into data collection and analysis processes, ensuring more inclusive programming across humanitarian activities.

These complementary trainings strengthened the capacity of humanitarian actors at multiple levels, laying a foundation for disability-inclusive approaches in program design and implementation.

Follow-Up and Impact – Mid 2023, ongoing

An Education Officer for UNICEF shared that OPD's involvement in the high-level and tool development trainings was particularly impactful. He noted that the presence of OPD leaders fostered a deeper understanding among humanitarian organizations of the essential role of disability inclusion and provided OPDs with valuable networking opportunities.

In mid-2023, as a direct follow-up to the high-level training and sustained advocacy, for example, UN Women conducted an accessibility audit of their office and constructed a ramp to enhance disability inclusion within their organization. This training contributed to meaningful organizational shifts, as evidenced by UN Women's improvements in office accessibility.

Further follow-up occurred from May 15 to 17, 2024, with a review in Yaoundé involving six selected UN agencies, INGOs, national NGOs, and the Ministry of Social Affairs. Rather than training, this follow-up focused on visiting their respective offices to discuss the impact of previous trainings on their work and the changes implemented. The goal was to assess progress and reinforce disability-inclusive practices across participating organizations.

These continuous efforts have embedded disability inclusion more deeply across sectors, supporting organizations in implementing and monitoring inclusive practices as a fundamental part of the humanitarian response framework. The experiences from the high-level training highlighted the need for continuous collaboration with OPDs and demonstrated how structured, senior-level engagement can drive a disability-inclusive humanitarian response.

Success Factors and Strategic Achievements

Collaborative Approach

Various aspects were contributing success factors for anchoring disability inclusion in the humanitarian response, one of them was continuous relationship building and collaboration with influential humanitarian actors: In November 2022, the Protection Cluster, through the Senior Protection Sector Coordinator from UNHCR, approached CBM for the first time to constitute a technical review committee for the HRP projects. This collaboration resulted from CBM's active participation in OCHA-organized trainings on the HNO/HRP process, during which CBM presented key messages of the IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action and offered to provide technical expertise to INGOs and clusters. Following these sessions, where all cluster leads were present, the Protection Cluster engaged CBM to review projects submitted by its members through the clusters' online platform.

Throughout 2023, CBM and selected OPDs in the Northwest, Southwest, and Far North, which later constituted the Pool of Experts, were closely involved in the review and development of the HNO/HRP 2024. CBM worked closely with UN-OCHA to adapt data collection tools to ensure they captured disability-related information comprehensively. CBM organized an online session, with two OPD leaders from the Pool of Experts and in collaboration with the Information Management Working Group to validate these tools. This process embedded disability-inclusive measures into the MSNA tools, aligning them with the IASC guidelines and ensuring robust integration of disability inclusion into Cameroon's Humanitarian Response Plan.

From September to November 2023, CBM, again in collaboration with UN-OCHA extended this approach through targeted workshops with OPDs and humanitarian actors, specifically focusing on the HNO and HRP cycles. UN-OCHA organized these workshops, while CBM ensured OPD representation and participation, partly by securing transportation and lodging for selected OPDs. A senior staff from UNICEF noted that OPDs' involvement was highly valued, as their insights clarified disability inclusion elements and enriched response plans with their perspectives. This period enabled OPDs to actively participate in consultations across multiple humanitarian sectors, reinforcing their role in shaping inclusive response planning.

HNO/HRP: Achievements in 2023 and 2024

Building on the progress described earlier, the following outlines the key achievements and milestones in advancing disability inclusion within Cameroon's HNO and HRP processes.

The inclusion of disability considerations in Cameroon's humanitarian planning processes has evolved significantly over the years, driven by the active involvement of CBM and OPDs. In 2023, the HRP development process concluded in December 2022, setting the stage for a foundational approach to disability inclusion, with efforts focused on mainstreaming disability considerations as part of broader cross-cutting themes like gender and age. Early 2023 marked the start of the HRP 2024 development, during which OPD leaders began playing more formalized roles, supported by CBM through the LNOB3 project and directly by UN OCHA.

Seven OPD leaders participated in regional workshops alongside humanitarian actors, contributing disability-specific insights across sectors such as health, nutrition, and protection. This process enriched the multi-sectoral needs assessments and ensured a disability lens was integrated into the review and refinement of project proposals.

As a result, the Cameroon HRP for 2024 stands out as an exemplary disability-inclusive plan. It includes specific targets and indicators that track progress and ensure accountability in implementing inclusive activities. The plan's objectives mentions on page 81 that data collection,

analysis, and response planning must address the distinct risks, requirements, and vulnerabilities of women, girls, men, boys, older people, and persons with disabilities. CBM's continued support is highlighted in the HRP, confirming its role in mainstreaming disability inclusion across humanitarian responses.

Between 2023 and 2024, the inclusion of disability in Cameroon's HRPs showed notable progress, with CBM and OPDs, later on the Pool of Experts, contributing to the advancement of disability inclusion in both years. In 2023, the plan established the foundation for disability inclusion by integrating it into gender, age, and diversity considerations. Capacity-building efforts and disability mainstreaming were prioritized, laying the groundwork for more focused actions. By 2024, the approach became more explicit, with disability-specific targets and data disaggregation introduced across key sectors such as health, education, and protection. This shift reflected an increased commitment to inclusive humanitarian action, with CBM's continued engagement helping to ensure a more structured and targeted response to the specific requirements of persons with disabilities.

Disability Inclusion in Cameroon's Humanitarian Response Plans (2023 and 2024)

In the **2023 Cameroon HRP**, disability was mainly addressed as part of cross-cutting themes like gender, age, and diversity, marking the start of a more inclusive approach in humanitarian planning. The focus was on ensuring that humanitarian assessments took these factors into account, setting the foundation for systematic mainstream responses. Notably, the 2023 HRP emphasized capacity-building initiatives, including training 200 individuals on inclusive humanitarian action, which encompassed disability inclusion, gender, and protection mainstreaming. Sectoral response frameworks also began to include disability considerations, though these were still largely focused on broad objectives rather than sector-specific interventions. Specific actions, such as constructing gender- and disability-sensitive latrines and including persons with disabilities in protection mainstreaming, reflected a growing recognition of the importance of inclusion. The health sector also prioritized equitable access to healthcare, ensuring persons with disabilities were considered in access strategies. Furthermore, the WASH sector addressed the inclusion of persons with disabilities through the distribution of kits. However, while the groundwork for disability inclusion was laid in 2023, the response still lacked robust sector-specific follow-ups and mechanisms for tracking progress.

In **2024 Cameroon HRP**, the approach to disability inclusion was expanded and made more explicit across sectors, building on the progress of the previous year. The 2024 HRP identified 505,400 persons with disabilities, with 345,100 targeted for assistance, marking a significant increase in the disaggregation of data and providing a clearer picture of the population in need. Disability inclusion was embedded within Strategic Objectives 1 and 3, explicitly ensuring that the specific requirements of persons with disabilities were systematically addressed. The use of global estimates, highlighting that persons with disabilities represent 15%⁵ of the affected population, emphasized the importance of a tailored, inclusive response strategy. Sector-specific measures were further developed in 2024, such as the creation of referral mechanisms within the health sector to assist vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities. Additionally, the nutrition sector saw investments in strengthening data collection systems to ensure sex-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data were captured for better-informed responses. The protection sector set specific targets for providing legal assistance to individuals, disaggregated by sex and disability, and included persons with disabilities in livelihood support initiatives.

⁵ The WHO estimates that 16% of the global population are persons with disabilities (WHO 2022: Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities, retrieved from <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240063600>)

Disability Inclusion in Cameroon's HNOs: A Comparative Overview (2023-2024)

The inclusion of disability-related considerations in Cameroon's HNOs has improved notably between 2023 and 2024, both in frequency and depth of reporting. In the 2023 HNO, references to disability-related issues appeared only three times, primarily highlighting barriers faced by persons with disabilities in accessing safety, education, and services. In contrast, the 2024 HNO included 13 mentions, reflecting a more substantial effort to integrate disability considerations into sectoral planning and response strategies. In terms of data disaggregation, the 2024 HNO relied on global estimates to emphasize the significance of including persons with disabilities, highlighting their representation as a substantial portion of the population. However, no Washington Group Questions⁶ were used to collect primary data, indicating a reliance on secondary data sources and estimates rather than direct field assessments. The 2023 HNO described persons with disabilities as being disproportionately impacted by crises due to mobility barriers, degradation of support systems, and lack of accessible services. Specific vulnerabilities included being left behind during displacement and increased exposure to violence and exploitation. By 2024, more detailed accounts of vulnerabilities were presented, including the loss of assistive devices, increased dependency, and heightened risks of abuse (17% of persons with disabilities reported experiencing abuse since the crisis).



Participants of the HNO Workshop in Buea, held in October 2023. © CBM

⁶ The Washington Group on Disability Statistics. About the Washington Group. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com> The WGQ has been recognized as the most reliable tool for collecting and analyzing data on disability, particularly for its disaggregation at the minimum of six core functional domains: seeing, hearing, walking, cognition, self-care, and communication. When a reliable source on disability is not available, the World Bank/WHO suggests that 16% of the population are persons with disabilities.

Strategic Achievements

Three key achievements emerged from this collaborative process:

Inclusive Planning for the development of HRP 2023 and 2024: The HRPs 2023 and 2024 can be considered a model for disability inclusion, featuring specific targets and measurable indicators that systematically address the requirements of persons with disabilities. This approach enhances accountability and promotes disability-inclusive response strategies across sectors.

Recognition of OPDs in Humanitarian Processes: OPDs are increasingly recognized as essential partners within the humanitarian community, actively contributing to inclusive assessments and planning. Their role is progressively expanding from advocacy to technical engagement within sectoral and intersectoral discussions. This shift is pivotal, as it not only positions OPDs as key stakeholders in policy development but also empowers them to directly influence the implementation of inclusive practices, ensuring that disability considerations are embedded in every aspect of the humanitarian response.

3.) The Evolution and Impact of the Pool of Experts: The Pool of Experts idea emerged from the initial 2022 mapping process, which identified and engaged OPD leaders experienced and interested in humanitarian topics, to form a group focused on advocating for and implementing disability-inclusive practices. Initially called the 'Disability Inclusion Working Group', the group transitioned into the 'Pool of Experts' to emphasize its technical and advisory roles.

The Pool provides consistent opportunities for OPDs to engage directly in humanitarian planning, offering a platform for several OPDs to stay actively involved over time. Through targeted training and active participation in cluster meetings, these members have developed the skills necessary to influence policies and tools for inclusion in humanitarian action, particularly in sectors like health, protection, and nutrition.

The Northwest Regional Representative of the Disability Inclusion Pool of Experts, Armelle Nongning Aimerique, Board Chairperson of CUAPWD, based in Bamenda, highlighted how the project significantly enhanced the knowledge of OPDs, especially regarding the IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. Before this initiative, many persons with disabilities were unaware of these guidelines, their rights, and how they should be represented in humanitarian planning. Armelle's confidence in the progress made was evident as she stated:

'I will boldly say we are ready to take part because so far we have received a lot of capacity building in diverse ways because I, as a woman with a disability who is also a leader of women with disabilities, was privileged to be part of this!'

The Pool of Experts: Current functioning and future plans

The Pool of Experts, coordinated by key leaders such as Chick Fru Sama, General Coordinator of CUAPWD, based in Bamenda, plays a vital role in advancing disability inclusion in humanitarian actions across Cameroon. The Pool of Experts comprises 16 active members, including a Chairman, Co-Lead, Information Management Officer, and Regional Representatives in the Northwest, Southwest, and Far North regions. This structure allows for effective coordination across Cameroon, ensuring that disability inclusion is addressed both at the national and regional levels, with dedicated regional focal points.

The Pools' primary goal is to operationalize the IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action by embedding disability inclusion into all aspects of humanitarian response. To achieve this, the Pool of Experts has developed a one-year action plan, outlining specific steps to be taken by its members to ensure the mainstreaming of disability inclusion in humanitarian programming. Members of the Pool of Experts engage actively through digital platforms, such as WhatsApp groups, to coordinate activities, share resources, and discuss project proposals. They also attend cluster meetings, providing technical advice to ensure that disability inclusion is systematically integrated into humanitarian planning and response activities.

Additionally, the Pool of Experts facilitates coordination among its members and other relevant stakeholders through regular meetings, advocacy, and resource-sharing, promoting synergies and avoiding duplication in disability-related efforts. It also engages with government bodies, partners, and stakeholders to advocate for the effective implementation of disability-inclusive policies and programs, in line with the UN CRPD.

The Pool of Experts actively mobilizes and mentors other OPDs, promoting broader participation in both advocacy and technical roles. However, humanitarian actors in Cameroon sometimes question the technical capabilities of the OPDs, which can limit their full integration into mainstreaming processes. Recognizing that persons with disabilities in these roles may have varying levels of interest and expertise across different themes, ongoing support is essential to empower progress in areas where it is most needed and where their contributions can have the greatest impact.

Challenges persist, as noted by Chick Fru Sama:

'Accessing technical documents remains a significant barrier for colleagues requiring better adaptation of technical documents and accessibility measures.'

Furthermore, it was highlighted that not all OPDs have had the opportunity to actively engage in the Pool's activities, underlining the need for more inclusive participation and equitable opportunities. In collaboration with CBM the Pool members have therefore planned to pass on their knowledge to more OPDs and OPD members, which have not yet benefitted from dedicated capacity development.



The CBM DID Officer is providing input during training for various humanitarian actors in Cameroon. © CBM

Remaining Challenges and Recommendations

Despite progress in promoting disability inclusion, significant challenges remain in sustaining these efforts within humanitarian planning in Cameroon. A major issue is the lack of comprehensive and reliable data on persons with disabilities in crisis-affected regions, such as the Far North, Northwest, and Southwest. This data gap hinders the ability to design and implement disability-inclusive measures effectively. Findings from the last MSNA revealed that only 2% of persons with disabilities were identified – global estimates point to an average of 16% globally, a figure which tends to rise in humanitarian contexts, underlining limitations in data collection methodologies and the urgent need for more accurate tools.

UN-OCHA Cameroon emphasized the importance of integrating disability-inclusive indicators into the HRP, calling it a significant achievement. However, they stressed that more effort is needed to operationalize these considerations effectively. They also called for sustained and proactive engagement with sector leads underlining the importance of embedding disability inclusion into the agendas of key decision-makers across all levels of humanitarian response.

Additional barriers to disability inclusion in Cameroon’s humanitarian response include:

Time Constraints: Tight deadlines for reviewing tools and documents often clash with the regular workloads of OPD members and humanitarian actors, limiting their ability to fully engage in consultations and planning processes.

Conflict and Logistics Issues: OPDs operating in conflict-affected zones face additional barriers, such as lockdowns and poor network connectivity, which delay their participation in consultations and meetings, slowing the effective integration of disability-inclusive practices.

Accessibility Barriers: Experts with visual disabilities face particular challenges in accessing documents and resources, limiting their ability to contribute fully to the humanitarian response. Restrictions on accessing key databases, such as OCHA's, further complicate their involvement.

To address these challenges, continued engagement, targeted capacity-building and investment in practical tools are necessary.

Recommendations

To build on existing successes and address ongoing challenges, the following priorities are essential:

Proactive Engagement with Sectors: Ensure disability-inclusive strategies are operationalized through active participation in sectoral meetings and planning processes, particularly by trained OPDs and CBM. Their expertise should be leveraged to integrate disability-inclusive practices effectively within sectoral responses.

Expanding the Operational Scope of the Pool of Experts: Develop a structured action plan and increase the visibility of the Pool among humanitarian actors to enhance its effectiveness. This structured collaboration will ensure that disability inclusion is consistently integrated into the overall humanitarian response, supporting more effective programming across regions.

Improving Access to Technical Resources: Facilitate access to existing technical resources through dedicated web platforms or repositories, including the development of a Toolkit for the Pool of Experts. This toolkit would provide guidelines, checklists, and sector-specific tools, enabling the Pool of Experts to access and utilize resources effectively. By centralizing these materials, the toolkit ensures consistency and quality in its contributions, supporting a more structured and efficient approach to disability inclusion across humanitarian sectors.

Technical Support and Capacity Building: Provide long-term support to local OPDs to enhance their capacity to contribute meaningfully to humanitarian response efforts. Strengthening the technical skills of OPDs will ensure that their advocacy and practical contributions remain aligned with global best practices.

Strengthening Collaboration: Promote deeper partnerships between OPDs and humanitarian organizations to ensure consistent integration of disability-inclusive perspectives into sectoral strategies. This collaboration should aim to ensure the consistent integration of disability-inclusive perspectives into sectoral strategies. Regular coordination meetings and shared resources will help to streamline efforts and avoid gaps or duplication.

Securing Sustainable Funding for Disability-Inclusive Initiatives: Address funding challenges by advocating for both emergency and long-term financial support to ensure the continued implementation of disability-inclusive policies and programs across all humanitarian sectors.

This structured approach is critical to sustaining and advancing disability inclusion within humanitarian frameworks, ensuring that the perspectives and specific requirements of persons with disabilities are embedded in every phase of planning and response.